



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**PARENTS' PREPARATIONS OF THEIR CHILDREN
FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL:
A SURVEY IN KAPIT TOWN**

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**Bachelor of Education with Honours
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Judul: **PARENTS' PREPARATIONS OF THEIR CHILDREN FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL:
A SURVEY IN KAPIT TOWN**

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The work described in this Final Year Project, entitled
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is to the best of the author’s knowledge that of the author except
where due reference is made.

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ABSTRACT

There are no prescribed ways on how parents prepare their children for primary school. However, most researchers have surveyed on perceptions of parents, teachers and the school authority on children readiness for school, and found varied views on how children should be ready for school. This study presents interview findings from 24 parents of Kapit Town regarding their preparations of children for primary school. The study seeks to find out how parents prepare their children for primary school by carrying out a survey in Kapit Town. For the purpose of this study, only three components of children's needs are focused, they include physical needs, social-emotional needs and cognitive needs. Another objective is to identify factors influencing the preparations. Comparison in between three races, the Malay, the Iban and the Chinese as well as three income-levels are sought after. This study found that preparations on their children's physical, social-emotional and cognitive needs are equally important to the respondents. Detailed examples are provided by respondents on how they prepare on the three domains. Background factors such as poverty and educational level of original family are the major influences on parents' preparations. If compared to the Malay and Iban parents in this study, the Chinese respondents in this study have presented a tendency to emphasise more on preparing their children's cognitive needs, while the lower income group of respondents have conveyed financial as a constraint for preparing their children for primary school.

ABSTRAK

Tiada satu ketetapan yang perlu dipatuhi oleh ibubapa bagi menyediakan anak-anak mereka memasuki sekolah rendah. Walaubagaimanapun, kebanyakan kajian lepas telah mengkaji tentang persepsi ibubapa, guru dan autoriti sekolah berkenaan dengan persediaan kanak-kanak ke sekolah di mana pengkaji-pengkaji telah mendapati pandangan yang pelbagai tentang bagaimana kanak-kanak perlu bersedia ke sekolah. Kajian ini mengemukakan dapatan daripada temuramah ke atas 24 orang ibubapa yang menetap di Pekan Kapit, berkenaan dengan persediaan-persediaan yang dilakukan oleh mereka untuk menyediakan anak-anak mereka ke sekolah rendah. Tujuan utama kajian adalah untuk mengkaji bagaimana ibubapa membuat persediaan untuk anak-anak mereka memasuki sekolah rendah. Untuk tujuan kajian ini, hanya tiga komponen keperluan kanak-kanak menjadi fokus, iaitu keperluan fizikal, sosial-emosi serta kognitif. Selain itu, faktor-faktor pendorong menjadi objektif kedua kajian. Seterusnya, objektif ketiga adalah untuk membuat perbandingan di antara tiga kaum, iaitu Melayu, Iban dan Cina, dan juga tiga kumpulan pendapatan yang berlainan tahap. Kajian ini telah mendapati ketiga-tiga keperluan fizikal, kognitif dan social emosi adalah sama penting bagi responden-responden dalam persediaan anak-anak ke sekolah. Faktor kemiskinan serta taraf pendidikan keluarga asal responden menjadi faktor penyebab utama dalam persediaan anak-anak ke sekolah. Ibubapa berbangsa Cina didapati lebih mengutamakan persediaan keperluan kognitif anak-anak mereka jika dibandingkan dengan ibubapa Melayu dan Iban dalam kajian ini. Selain itu, kumpulan responden dari pendapatan rendah telah mengemukakan pendapatan keluarga sebagai satu kekangan dalam menyediakan anak-anak mereka ke sekolah rendah.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter discusses the importance of parent-child relationship and how parenting and children development are interrelated. Further on, the chapter reviews on the issue of starting school by looking at awareness and readiness of parents on that and the importance of this to children. Other than this, the objectives that characterise the directions of the study are clearly outlined in this chapter. They are then supported by the significances in conducting the study. Finally, the last section encompasses definition of operational key terms and scope of the study.

1.1 Introduction

The social life of a child starts from the home and it determines significantly the way an individual's abilities, attitudes and opinions are constructed, particularly in the development of motivation towards school and later years (Fontana, 1981: p. 3-4). Therefore, a child's first social relationship starts from the early years, in particular with their parents at home. This clearly shows that parents hold a critical role in nurturing their child. This includes knowledge that parents possess regarding every aspect of children development. As a child grows up, parents begin to prepare

the child for entering schooling environment. In relation to that, different parents from different socio economy background, at different age group and different races probably have their ways of preparing their children for school. Therefore, this study aims to look it into differing or similar ways of preparations that probably exist, and to look into how these preparations differ.

1.2 Background of the Study

The relationship between parents and their children is important as it influences the functioning of children in their later life. Dowling (2005: p. 68) emphasises that the shared experiences and attention between parents and children are developed over time as the results of close relationship between them. This experience comes from living together and sharing joy and tears are vital to shape the child's life in the future. It is further stated by Hoghughi (2004: p. 8) that parents shape the development of children towards fulfilling potentials in all areas of functioning. It is parents who are responsible for their children's functions in later years. In other words, the impact of early childhood life may be casted in the later years of the child. Thus, it is important for parents to be aware of their relationship with their children which are indeed significant in term of impacting their children life afterwards.

Most parents are aware of their roles in deciding what their children might become in the future. In fact, they are aware of parenting is not an easy task, Hoffman (2002, as cited in Hoghughi and Long, 2004: p. 7) defined parenting as "*purposive activities aimed at ensuring the survival and development of children*". It is clear that the final aim of parenting is to ensure that their children would function well in life. Therefore, there are needs for parents to know and aware of the development process of their children as they are nurturing them.

Consequently, parents are reminded to be conscious of their children's development, especially of which are apparent to them. Hoghughi and Long (2004: p. 9-10) advocate four areas that need parental attentions for children's development. They are physical health, intellectual and educational functioning, social behaviour as well as mental health. Physical health includes all physical states, survival needs and optimization of well-beings. Intellectual and educational functioning is important for a child to effectively survive in educational and work competencies. Social behaviour covers all aspects of responsiveness to the environment including social interactions. Mental health includes thoughts, feelings and behavioural tendencies of children towards themselves and others. As a result of this, children have needs that are necessary to function in any settings in their life. It is necessary for parents to realise these needs. This suggested four areas by Hoghughi and Long (2004) can be summarised into basically four main domains: psychological needs, physical needs, cognitive needs and social needs.

The final aims of parents in nurturing children are mostly of hoping their children to function successfully in society and be able to live independent in life. The wish to see their children succeeding in life is the fundamental drive that directs them to care for their children's development. This is especially evident when parents are anxious when the child begins school. Certainly, most parents wish their children are ready for school when the time has come. For children, starting school is a new and exciting experience for them. Fabian (2002: p. 1) has described starting school as a big transition in a child's life as they will have to adapt to a totally new environment, new routine and unfamiliar people to them. Therefore, anxiety and excitement may occur on children when they are joining school. At this point, parents are the ones to give support and care for them for this big transition in life.

Fabian (2002: p. 1) has also highlighted that in this transition; there are no standards of prescriptions for parents to follow. He further defines it as having

differences depending on *a wide range of contextual and socio-cultural variability*. Since there is no a set of rules to be followed as to how to guide children throughout the experience in starting primary school, parents may venture into this territory depending on their own instinct, life principle or experience. Therefore, variations exist in ways of preparing their children for school. Other than there is no prescribed ways for preparations, various factors influence parents in the way they prepare their children for primary school. Some parents might be culturally bound when preparing their children for school. Others might be bound by economy status or lack of experiences, being the first time parents.

1.3 Statement of Problem

There are little studies done in investigating how parents prepare their children for school. Those related studies to this topic are mostly focus on children readiness for school and children starting school. From the study conducted by Saluja G. (2000) surveying of state policies and definitions on readiness for school, concludes that age is the criterion most often applied to determine if a child is ready for school and decisions on how children should be assessed predetermines school entry. In the study by Sue Dockett and Bob Perry on beliefs and expectations of parents, prior-to-school educators and school teachers as children start school, they sum up the significance of all parties participate in the phase of children's starting school in order to strive and make children's transition to school as smooth as possible. Another recent survey by Donna J. Grace and Mary E. Brandt (2006) on children's readiness for success in kindergarten is conducted in Hawaii. This survey investigates the early childhood community in Hawaii and found out parents, teachers and administrators consider social-emotional development, language and communication, dispositions towards learning, physical health and well-being and school-related behaviours are more important to readiness for school success than basic knowledge and academic skills.

These studies as stated above focus majorly on investigating the views from the whole early childhood community on the issue of children's readiness for school. Generally, the participants of surveys believe that starting school does not happen automatically and it requires preparations. In this view of the importance of children being ready or prepared for school in order to success in school in later years, it is significant to look into the process of preparing children for school by parents, who are the ones responsible for the preparations. In addition, there is no previous local study about parents' preparations of their children for school being documented or published in any form, in this it arises a need to investigate this area that might provide information for future studies, or for any organisations aim to design parenting programmes for educating parents for the importance of preparation of children for school.

Parents' preparations of their children for school might differ significantly depending on various reasons. As stated in the survey by Donna J. Grace and Mary E. Brandt (2006), in the view of the survey's participants, there are some domains that are more significant to them compared to other domains in children's ready for success in school, that include social-emotional development, language and communication, dispositions towards learning, physical health and well-being and school-related behaviours. In the issue of preparations of children for school, it is interesting to look into domains in children development that appear significant to parents when their children come to school age. In relation to this, to look into the needs in children to be prepared for primary school which appear significant for parents. For such, this study will categorise these needs into three: physical needs, social-emotional needs, and cognitive needs before their children enter school.

The categorisation into the three major needs is conducted by referring to the concerns of parents with children in early childhood (of age two to six). According to Teresa M. Mcdevitt and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod (2004: p. 540), physical development that needs parents' concern includes safety, self-care routines, and physical exercises;

cognitive development that needs parents' concern consists of curiosity, questions and response, reading and school related skills; social-emotional development includes temper, sharing, aggressive behaviours, formation of new relationships through interactions.

The variety ways of individual parent in preparing might also differ in terms of amount of time, resources or expenses. Furthermore, it is interesting to look into the factors that are behind parents' decision of working out in such a way to prepare their children for school. These factors might be related to culture, experiences, social economy status, races or ethnicity and difference of age groups. Therefore, it is essential for this study to look into what parents do to prepare their children for school and the variation in factors that lie behind the preparations.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To find out how parents' prepare their children for primary school.
- ii. To find out what factors influence parents' preparations of their children for primary school.
- iii. To investigate similarities and differences in parents' preparation of their children for primary school.

1.5 Research Questions

- i. How do parents prepare their children for primary school in terms of children's physical needs, social-emotional needs and cognitive needs?
- ii. What are the factors that influence parents' preparations of their children for primary school?

- iii. What are the similarities and differences exist among parents from different races and income-levels in their preparations of their children for school.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The chief concern of this study is to find out how do parents prepare their children for primary school. Most significantly, it looks into the relevant factors that might influence these preparations. As the data are collected among parents from different background, the researcher sets goal to look into the similarities and the differences in preparations that arise among those parents in terms of income-levels and races.

This study will be conducted in Kapit Town among parents residing in the town. This town consists of people from different ethnicity and socio-economy background. According to a source from the Ministry of Urban Development and Tourism of Sarawak (2005), the largest ethnic group in Kapit is the Iban, the rest are the Orang Ulu, Chinese, Malay and Melanau. It is also stated that mostly those who live in Kapit town are those involved in business, private and civil services sectors. Based on 2000 census, Kapit Town has around 13, 610 people. Although there is only river accessing to the town from other towns, the town is described as '*surprisingly a vibrant town with people from downstream and upriver coming to trade and socialise*'. As observed by the researcher in recent years, the town people have an increasing awareness on importance of education this few years. Some even migrated from longhouses to live in the town for education purposes. This is evident in the increasing number of early childhood settings such as nurseries, preschools and kindergartens within the region. There are eight preschools set up in Kapit, three of them are established by private organisations and the others are government preschools. These eight preschools are those registered to the Preschool Department

of *Jabatan Pelajaran Negeri*, as recorded in *Pejabat Pelajaran Gabungan Kapit*. At this juncture, the researcher holds much interest to survey on the nature of parents' perceptions regarding preparing their children for educations.

Since there is no other studies on early childhood research can be found conducted in this town, it is essential for a study that document any issue of early childhood research. For this, it is hoped that this study will benefit the school administrators, teachers and parents in Kapit Town. Chiefly, the research aims to communicate the situations and needs from the point of view of parents regarding issues of school readiness, especially to school administrators and teachers. Then, it seeks to provide future teachers with helpful information on parents' preparations of their children for school. If there is any gap, teachers are going to fill in the gaps to help children be more prepared for school. Also, it is hoped that the data will become a resource for other parents to better prepare their children for school, especially first-time parents. Lastly, this study aims to improving understanding between administrators and parents, as well as teachers and parents regarding issues in preparations for school.

1.7 Operational Definition of Key Terms

i. Parents

The word 'parents' in this study refers to both father and mother of the children, In this study, the aimed participants are parents with at least a child who is in the age range of 3-8. In Malaysia context, this refers to those parents with at least a child who is in the local preschools or kindergartens, or in primary one or primary two of primary school. To be specific, these parents not only are those fulfilling the above criteria,

but also are those residing in Kapit Town, the region as specified for the research.

ii. Preparations

Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2003) explains the term 'preparations' as plans or arrangements that you make to prepare for something: This study terms the word 'preparations' as the criteria involved in the process of parents in preparing their children for school. The preparations are to be categorized into three domains: physical preparations, social-emotional preparations and cognitive preparations. These three terms are explained based on Teresa M. Mcdevitt and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod (2004: p. 540). The physical preparations are relate to safety, self-care routines, physical exercises, and physical items; the social-emotional preparations are those relate to temper, sharing, aggressive behaviours, formation of new relationship; the cognitive preparations include curiosity, questions and response, school-related skills such as reading, writing and counting.

iii. Children

In this study, 'children' here refers to children age three to six, in which they are attending preschools or kindergartens in any of the local preschools or kindergartens within Kapit Town. This group of children is going into primary schools. Or, 'children' in this study also means those of age seven and eight, they are in the first year and second year of primary school.

iv. Primary School

In this study, primary school refers to the elementary school in Malaysia context. It is where children start their primary education in a formal setting. Children in Malaysia are compulsory to go through six years of primary education before they go up to secondary school. However, the preschool educations are optional for parents and there is no standard age of starting preschool educations.

v. Kapit Town

Kapit Town situated in the central part of Sarawak. It is one of the towns situated in the largest division of Sarawak, Kapit Division. It is also the division's capital. There are more than 10 thousands residents in the town.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on surveying perceptions of parents in Kapit Town regarding their preparations of their children for primary school. The participants must have at least a child of age three to eight-year-old. This is intended to get parents who have had experience preparing their children for preschools and kindergartens, and would have to go on preparing their children for primary schools. With the cooperation of the administrators of preschools and kindergartens of Kapit Town, most appropriate participants that suit to the nature of the research were identified in the sampling process. From the information provided, the participants are chosen purposively from different races and socio-economy background.

The researcher will employ semi-structured interview methods to obtain relevant responses from the participants. It is specifically to obtain data from participants regarding their preparations of preparing their children for primary school. This is divided into three domains: physical preparations, social emotional preparations and cognitive preparations of their children for primary school. Also, the factors behind that influence the preparations are also another focus of the study. Then, the different background of the participants would be analysed to obtain further information on any differences that might exist in different socio-economy and races of parents.

1.9 Chapter Review

In sum, this chapter discussed about the background of the study as well as the directions to how the study will be conducted.